MANAGEMENT OF NOAA SMALL BOATS

SECTION 1. PURPOSE.

.01 This Order establishes National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) policy for management and safe operation of NOAA boats less than 300 gross tons.

.02 This Order establishes minimum standards and required inspections to be followed by all NOAA programs operating boats.

.03 This Order establishes standards of visual identification and registration for NOAA boats.

SECTION 2. BACKGROUND.

Operating boats in support of marine research involves unique associated risks. Many NOAA programs rely on boats to achieve mission requirements. There are numerous regulatory standards that address boat safety, but little guidance or few regulations tailored specifically to the special mission of research motorboats less than 65 feet or small research vessels less than 300 gross tons. Current marine standards are derived from international conventions, lessons learned from casualties, and advances in technology. As such, the body of regulatory information continues to grow and change. All vessels owned by NOAA are considered public vessels and are therefore exempt from regulatory oversight by the United States Coast Guard (USCG). However, it is NOAA's intent, as steward of the Nation's oceans and atmosphere, to comply with, or exceed, all applicable regulatory and industry standards and to foster a management culture committed to safe and environmentally sound boat operations based upon the principles of risk management.

SECTION 3. DEFINITIONS.

.01 Alteration and Repair of Boats.

a. Alteration or Modification. A change to the configuration of a boat with regard to its navigation, communication, mission, ventilation, or piping systems. Examples of an alteration or modification include the addition of scientific transducers or RADAR sets, rearrangement of helm consoles, conversion of spaces (e.g., storage space to lab space), or installation of port lights.

b. Significant Alteration or Modification. A change to the configuration of a boat with regard to structural, mechanical, or electrical systems. Examples of significant alterations include the addition of structures or winches, the addition of any weight handling gear (e.g., A-frame,

crane, articulated boom), replacement of inboard propulsion engines, installation of electric generators, lengthening of a vessel, or addition of a bow pulpit.

c. Repair. A restoration of a boat's configuration or capability that is necessary because of wear and/or failure of existing systems and equipment.

.02 Boat. As used in this Order, refers to all craft less than 300 gross registered tons propelled by any means and commonly used to carry people on a body of water, but does not include sea planes.

.03 Gross Registered Tonnage (gross tons). As used in this Order, is a unit of measure referenced to determine applicable regulations for vessels. Measurement of gross tons is defined in Part 69.209(a) of Title 46 of the Code of Federal Regulations (46 CFR 69.209(a)) and for most monohull vessels will be determined by the formula: gross tonnage = (overall length x overall breadth x overall depth) x 0.67 /100.

.04 Overall Length. Or length overall (LOA) as used in this Order, and as defined in 46 CFR 69.203, means the horizontal distance between the outboard side of the foremost part of the stem and the outboard side of the aftermost part of the stern, excluding rudders, outboard motor brackets, and other similar fittings and attachments.

.05 Motorboat. As used in this Order, refers to all craft less than 300 gross registered tons propelled by machinery and commonly used to carry people on a body of water, but does not include sea planes.

.06 Motorboat Classifications. NOAA motorboat classifications are developed from USCG definitions for motorboats, and apply to all boats propelled by machinery, as follows:

a. Class A - less than 16 feet length overall;

b. Class I - 16 feet but less than 26 feet length overall;

c. Class II - 26 feet but less than 40 feet length overall;

d. Class III - 40 feet but not more than 65 feet length overall; and

e. Small Research Vessel (SRV) - greater than 65 feet length overall, but less than 300 gross tons and engaged in operations for greater than 12 hours.

.07 NOAA Boat. A boat owned, operated, or maintained by NOAA. The term includes boats leased, loaned, bare boat chartered, or demise chartered by or from NOAA but does not include boats time chartered by NOAA.

.08 NOAA Program. As used in this Order, the term refers to NOAA Line Offices, Staff Offices, and any of their subordinate entities.

.09 No-cost Transfer. As used in this Order, a means of gaining ownership of boats with little or no cost to the receiving entity. For example, no-cost transfers include, but are not limited to, boats received from government excess or via donation, gift, or bequest.

.10 Operational Risk Management. A process involving an examination of hazards and associated controls to reduce risk to personnel, vessels, environment, mission, or any stakeholder in NOAA operations.

.11 Program Manager. A government or contract employee in charge of, and having oversight over, a specific mission, activity, or scientific investigation within a NOAA Line or Staff Office. Examples of Program Managers include Chiefs of Fishery Ecology, Chiefs of Habitat Restoration, and Chiefs of Ocean Chemistry.

.12 Qualified Motorboat. As used in this Order describes motorboats that are elaborate or complex in terms of engineering design or mission. A list of qualified motorboats and sample qualifying criteria is available at the NOAA Small Boat Program web site.

.13 Responsible Person. A Government or contract employee whose position description requires him/her to be involved in the routine oversight or operation of a boat or boats. Examples of Responsible Persons include marine superintendents, port captains, field operations managers, environmental compliance & safety staff, captains, boat operators, and boat maintenance staff.

.14 Senior Field Manager. A government employee in charge of and having responsibility for all boat operations conducted at a NOAA program. Examples of Senior Field Managers include Laboratory Directors, Sanctuary Managers, Small Research Vessel Captains, or Field Party Chiefs.

.15 Vessel. See boat.

.16 Vessel Operations Manual (VOM). A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from an operational risk assessment. The VOM is intended to promulgate specific individualized requirements and instructions for the safe and efficient management and operation of a Small Research Vessel, Class III motorboat, or qualified Class II motorboat.

.17 Vessel Policy (VP). A compilation of instructions, procedures, regulations, and guidelines derived from an operational risk assessment. A VP is intended to promulgate management and safety policy applicable to all boats within a NOAA program.

SECTION 4. SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITY.

.01 NOAA programs that own, operate, or maintain boats shall be responsible:

a. for the safe operation, inspection compliance, life cycle management, and material condition of their boats;

b. for developing Vessel Policy (VP) and/or Vessel Operations Manuals (VOMs) for their boats;

c. for obtaining written guidance based on review by the NOAA Small Boat Program during the development, or prior to the promulgation of, VP and/or VOMs;

d. for assigning routine management and oversight of each boat to a Responsible Person; and

e. for providing estimates of resources needed to meet the requirements of this Order for any SRV, Class III motorboat, or qualified Class II motorboat to their respective senior management or budget planning official, and for ensuring that funding needed to achieve compliance with this Order will be available prior to any commitment that will result in delivery.

.02 The NOAA Small Boat Program shall be responsible:

a. for serving as principal advisor or technical point of contact for operational, maintenance, acquisition, or regulatory standards set forth by this Order;

b. for managing a database containing an inventory of vessels and their attributes;

c. for providing guidance, or review and comment, to Senior Field Managers or Responsible Persons during the development, or prior to the promulgation of, VP and/or VOMs;

d. for assisting NOAA programs, upon request, with the resource estimation prescribed in Section 4.01e. of this Order; and

e. for assisting Line Office activities on an as-needed basis, and to the extent that resources allow, with marine engineering, electronics, or regulatory interpretation support.

.03 The NOAA Small Boat Program, Line Offices, and Staff Offices are responsible for collaborating as partners with a common interest in safe, efficient, and environmentally sound boat operations. This partnership shall foster a corporate culture that values the boat operator, encourages the distribution of information, seeks a quality approach, shares commitment, and seeks to manage operational risk.

SECTION 5. MOTORBOAT ACQUISITIONS.

.01 Purchasing Motorboats.

a. Senior Field Managers, or their designees, shall assess the suitability of a new or used motorboat, or of a motorboat design, in relation to cost, mission requirements, operational risk, safety, and environmental compliance prior to initiating a motorboat purchase. The cost assessment and any required marine survey shall be forwarded to the respective senior management or budget official prior to any commitment.

b. Senior Field Managers, or their designees, shall notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator:

1. prior to a planned motorboat acquisition that would require significant alteration or modification to the boat after its delivery in order to meet mission requirements; or

2. prior to any commitment to build a motorboat to Government-furnished technical specifications.

c. When a motorboat meets the criteria of Section 5.01b. of this Order, Senior Field Managers, or their designees, shall ensure that contract specifications are written or reviewed by either a NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations (NMAO) Small Boat Engineer, a professional marine engineer, or a naval architect. The review shall ensure that the resultant boat will be properly configured with respect to safety systems, stability, mission capabilities, sound marine engineering practices, environmental compliance, and Appendix B of this Order, NOAA Boat Visual Identification and Registration.

d. Senior Field Managers may exempt Class A, I, or II motorboats from the requirement for assessing the suitability of a motorboat prior to acquisition (see Section 5.01a. of this Order) when the suitability and cost factors for the motorboat to be acquired are already addressed or known from previous experience with similar craft engaged in similar missions.

.02 No-Cost Transfer. Prior to taking ownership of a no-cost motorboat, Senior Field Managers, or their designees, shall:

a. evaluate the potential safety and environmental implications of the motorboat as it relates to costs of ownership, operation, and eventual disposal;

b. arrange for the marine survey required by Section 5.03 of this Order; and

c. notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator before committing to the no-cost transfer of any qualified Class II motorboats, Class III motorboats, or Small Research Vessels.

.03 Marine Surveys. A survey shall be conducted prior to any commitment that will result in delivery of a qualified Class II motorboat, Class III motorboat, or SRV. The marine survey shall examine the condition and value of the motorboat as well as the structural integrity and safety for its intended use. A marine survey is not required for a new boat or design.

SECTION 6. ALTERATION AND REPAIR OF MOTORBOATS.

.01 Review. All proposed alterations to NOAA motorboats shall be reviewed by the Program Manager or Responsible Person to assess their potential impact on safety, watertight integrity, and stability. Program Managers or Responsible Persons shall seek advice or guidance from an NMAO Small Boat Engineer if there is doubt with respect to potential impacts.

.02 Standards. Alterations and repairs shall be performed in accordance with applicable marine engineering standards, rules, instructions, and regulations. A listing of current and potentially

applicable standards, rules, instructions, and regulations is provided on the NOAA Small Boat Program web site.

.03 Significant Alterations. For all significant alterations, Senior Field Managers or Responsible Persons shall seek marine engineering services through NMAO or a professional marine engineer.

.04 Engineering Records. Records, such as drawings or weight and moment reports, resulting from the alteration of motorboats shall be maintained at the appropriate program office.

SECTION 7. OPERATION OF BOATS.

.01 Operational Risk Assessment. Every NOAA program that operates boats shall conduct an operational risk assessment. The assessment shall be based on an evaluation of operational risks to personnel, vessel, environment, mission, and public relations.

a. Vessel Operations Manual (VOM). Senior Field Managers, in consultation with their field personnel, shall develop a VOM for each SRV, Class III motorboat, and qualified Class II motorboat owned, operated, or maintained by their program. The VOM shall address the findings of the operational risk assessment prescribed in Section 7.01 of this Order as well as procedures specific to the operation of the boat.

b. Vessel Policy (VP). Senior Field Managers, in consultation with their field personnel, shall develop a comprehensive VP for their program. In addition to addressing the minimum requirements of this Order, the program's VP shall be tailored to address region-specific operational risks and other issues common to all boats owned, operated, or maintained by the program.

c. Assistance. Additional information and guidance relating to operational risk assessment and the development of operational risk management plans are available on line at the NOAA Small Boat Program web site.

.02 Float Plans.

a. All use of NOAA boats shall be documented by a float plan filed prior to departure which lists, as a minimum:

1. the vessel name;

2. date and time of departure;

3. intended destination or working area;

4. estimated date and time of return or arrival;

5. names of persons on board; and

6. type of operation (e.g., scuba diving, coring, observation, patrol).

b. The boat operator shall tender the plan, prior to departure, to a person on shore as follows:

1. for voyages of less than twelve (12) hours, the plan may be given verbally; or

2. for voyages of greater than twelve (12) hours duration, the plan must be written and shall establish a tracking and communications procedure that requires the boat to report its position and operations at least daily.

c. The person on shore shall be responsible for determining whether a vessel is overdue for arrival and shall be able to take appropriate action to either determine the location of the vessel or initiate emergency response.

.03 Emergency Contacts. Senior Field Managers, Program Managers, or their designees shall ensure that the name and contact number of a family member, significant other, or legal guardian is available for all persons embarked aboard a boat while the boat is being operated.

.04 Periodic Testing of Safety Equipment. Operational boats equipped with electronic safety equipment shall conduct periodic operational tests of the equipment. If no regulation exists for frequency of testing, it shall be done in accordance with manufacturers' instructions or monthly at a minimum. In addition, Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) beacon identification registration information shall be reviewed at least annually to ensure that it contains valid emergency contact information.

.05 Transportation of Passengers.

a. When permitted by VP or a VOM, and prearranged and approved by the Senior Field Manager or his/her designee, non-mission critical personnel may be transported as passengers on NOAA boats. Non-mission critical may include members of the media, guests, VIPs, or service organizations. Approvals will be granted when:

1. it is found to be clearly in the interest of the Government;

2. the boat is being used for official purposes; and

3. the passengers will not interfere with NOAA operations.

b. The boat operator may authorize the boarding and carriage of passengers in emergency situations involving the protection of life at sea. For further guidance consult NOAA Administrative Order (NAO) 217-106, Transportation of Nongovernment Personnel as Passengers on NOAA Vessels, Aircraft, and Motor Vehicles.

.06 Good Marine Practice.

a. All NOAA boats shall be operated in a safe and courteous manner.

b. All NOAA boats shall be maintained in a seaworthy condition.

c. Marine weather forecasts shall be evaluated with respect to the operations area, vessel limitations, and mission requirements prior to engaging in any boat operation.

.07 Operator Training and Certification. All operators of NOAA boats shall be appropriately trained and certified based on boat size, engineering complexity, and nature of operations. The following **minimum** training requirements apply.

a. NOAA Class III Motorboats and Small Research Vessels.

1. Commissioned or Warrant Officers of the Uniformed Services who have qualified as Officer of the Deck (Underway) and who have exercised this qualification during the past five (5) years may be considered as having qualifications equivalent to the USCG licensed operators.

2. Other than officers mentioned in Section 7.07a.1. of this Order, all designated operators must possess a valid USCG license appropriate to the intended service of the vessel.

b. NOAA Class A, I, or II Motorboats. Operators of NOAA Class A, I, or II motorboats shall obtain qualification by participation in either:

1. USCG Auxiliary basic boat operators course;

2. U.S. Power Squadron basic boat operators course;

3. U.S. Department of the Treasury Marine Law Enforcement Training Program; or

4. equivalent USCG or NOAA approved boat operator training course.

c. CPR and First Aid Training. All boat operators shall have current Red Cross or equivalent certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and First Aid.

d. Assistance. Additional information pertaining to operator training is available on line at the NOAA Small Boat Program web site.

.08 Accident Reporting and Investigation.

a. NOAA activities shall follow all existing policy regarding the reporting of accidents.

b. Senior Field Managers, or their designee, shall notify the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator of a motorboat accident or incident when it involves:

1. unintentional grounding for greater than 24 hours;

2. explosions;

3. sinking;

4. fire;

5. collisions involving breach of hull integrity;

6. any incident which results in damage in excess of $10,000 by or to the motorboat, its systems, or its equipment;

7. incapacitating injury requiring professional medical attention, hospitalization for greater than 72 hours, or loss of life of any person;

8. unintentional and extensive flooding (self bailing boats excluded);

9. discharge of oil or any substance capable of producing a sheen upon the water;

10. failure of gear and equipment and any other damage that may affect or impair a vessel's seaworthiness; or

11. damage to a protected or endangered natural resource.

c. When an accident meets the criteria in Section 7.08b. of this Order, and the cause of the accident is not clearly evident, the Senior Field Manager shall initiate an investigation. Findings and recommendations from the investigation shall be made available to the Senior Field Manager, Program Manager, NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator, NMAO Small Boat Engineer, the Director, NMAO, and NOAA's Chief Financial Officer/Chief Administrative Officer (NOAA's CFO/CAO).

d. Findings and lessons learned from an accident or accident investigation shall be distributed by the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator to the NOAA small boat user community. The identity of the vessel, personnel, and NOAA program will remain anonymous.

SECTION 8. INSPECTION OF BOATS.

.01 Purpose. NOAA's boat inspection program is designed to ensure that standards of safety are maintained at an acceptable level in order to minimize risk. See Appendix A of this Order, NOAA Boat Inspection, for detailed inspection program guidance and procedures.

.02 Inspection Criteria.

a. General. Inspection criteria will be determined by NMAO, with NOAA program involvement. Inspection criteria will be adapted from the most relevant regulations pertaining to boats of similar employment.

b. Safety, Fire Fighting, and Life Saving. The minimum safety, fire fighting, and life saving equipment requirements for boats are derived from USCG regulations for recreational vessels and are located in Table 1.0 to Appendix A of this Order.

c. Communications and Navigation. The minimum communication and navigation equipment requirements for boats are based on the distance from shore that the boat will operate and are located in Table 2.0 to Appendix A of this Order.

SECTION 9. BOAT IDENTIFICATION AND REGISTRATION.

.01 General. A uniform identification scheme is necessary to develop and promote public recognition of NOAA boat activities in the coastal environment. A uniform numbering system is required by U.S. Code for the purpose of identification.

.02 Requirements. Visual identification and registration requirements are provided in Appendix B to this Order.

SECTION 10. NOAA SMALL BOAT PROGRAM WEB SITE.

.01 General. A NOAA Small Boat Program web site shall be maintained:

a. to promote the exchange of operational best practices and methods;

b. to serve as a pool of corporate knowledge;

c. to provide resources relating to training, engineering, and operational support;

d. to provide resources and guidance related to operational risk assessment, VOMs, and VPs; and

e. to facilitate the practical implementation of this Order.

.02 URL. The NOAA Small Boat Program web site is located at www.sbp.noaa.gov.

SECTION 11. RECORDS MANAGEMENT.

.01 Inspection Reports. Maintained by NMAO.

.02 Vessel Operation Manuals (VOMs) and Vessel Policy (VP). Maintained by the NOAA field activity. Copies shall be provided to the NOAA Small Boat Program Coordinator.

.03 Risk Assessment Records. Records generated during risk assessments shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.04 Alteration Records. Engineering documents or drawings detailing alterations to motorboats shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.05 Operator Training Records. Operator training and certification records shall be maintained at the NOAA field activity.

.06 Boat Inventory. Boat inventories and hull registration numbers shall be maintained by the NOAA Small Boat Program.

SECTION 12. EFFECT ON OTHER ISSUANCES.

This Order supersedes NAO 217-103 dated June 20, 1991.

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Chief Financial Officer/Chief
Administrative Officer

Appendices

Office of Primary Interest:
NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations
Program Services and Outsourcing Division